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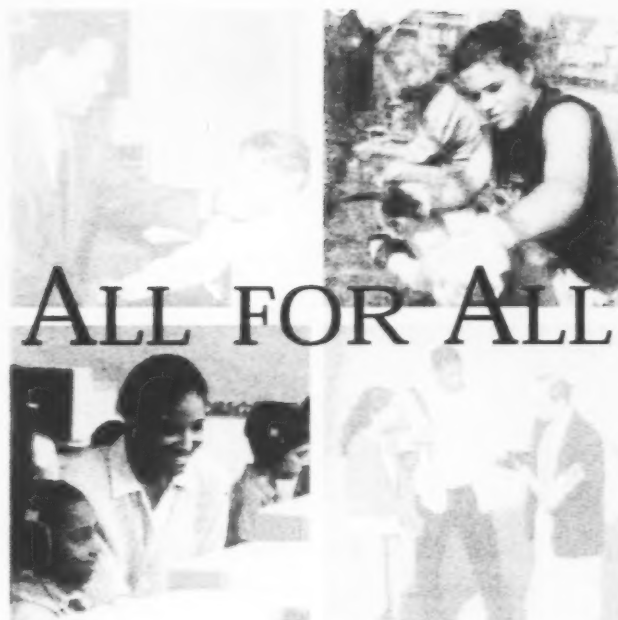
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## ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from a national poll that examined the attitudes of U.S. residents about and commitment to their local public schools. The poll and focus groups investigated the importance of public schools as a community resource, the role of individual citizens in solving community problems and addressing community needs, community involvement in supporting and improving local public schools, and general reactions to the concept of local education funds. Respondents were very willing to become more involved in supporting and improving their local public schools. They viewed public schools as a resource benefitting the entire community. They considered improving the quality of education a top priority. While concern about education and the quality of public schools was high, so was respondents' willingness to get involved to help improve schools. To improve local public schools, respondents identified solutions entailing more community effort and more community support. Respondents reacted positively to the concept of local education funds (LEFs) and were interested in donating time and money to such organizations. LEFs are community-based organizations that help develop and implement local public school improvement strategies, broker resources, and award grants; independent of the school districts they serve, LEFs bring together a wide range of stakeholders and serve a significant population of disadvantaged students. Despite respondents' focus on education and willingness to become more involved, challenges remain in fully engaging community involvement in and support for local public schools. The survey is attached. (SM)



### Strengthening Community Involvement for All Students

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*The mission of the  
Public Education  
Network (PEN) is  
to create systems  
of public educa-  
tion that result in  
high achievement  
for every child.*

## Public Education Network

The Public Education Network is the nation's largest network of independent, community-based school reform organizations. Through 49 members in 26 states and the District of Columbia, the Network serves more than 5.1 million children in more than 300 school districts. In the last two years, LEFs provided nearly \$125 million to the nation's public schools through more than 300 targeted school improvement programs.

The Network works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. Equal opportunity, access to quality public schools, and an informed citizenry are all critical components of a democratic society. The Network's goal is to ensure that the availability of high-quality public education is every child's right and not a privilege.

Improving public school systems is the responsibility of parents, individual citizens, and whole communities. Students, teachers, and school districts all need to be held to high standards. The Network advocates for significant changes in how school systems are funded, overhauling curriculum and assessment practices, ensuring authority and decision making at the school level, providing ongoing professional development for teachers, and engaging the public in building relationships between citizens, schools, and the communities they serve.

## Local Education Funds

Local education funds (LEFs) are tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations who work to improve student achievement for all children attending public schools. A local education fund convenes key players in the community, administers innovative school programs, brokers resources, awards grants, and enhances the visibility and value of the public schools.

Local education funds are independent of the school districts they serve and are focused on the improvement and reform of the public school system as a whole. LEFs are organized as ongoing community organizations with professional full-time staff and a board of directors reflective of the communities they serve.

LEFs work with public school systems, serving a significant population of disadvantaged students. Fifty-three percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in the communities served by Network members, compared to the U.S. average of 33 percent. Nearly two-thirds of the children reached by the Network are children of color.

LEFs convene a wide range of stakeholders to help develop and implement local public school improvement strategies. In cooperation with schools, businesses, and other community-based organizations, LEFs broker creative school reform initiatives with teachers, school boards, and administrators.



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# Community

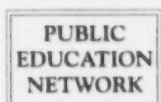


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# Involvement

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## Introduction & Welcome

Civic involvement has driven social progress in America since the days of the American Revolution. It is no coincidence that our Constitution opens with the phrase "We, the People." Since the founding of our nation, Americans have banded together in crusades to abolish slavery, give women the vote, end racial segregation, and save the environment. In education, Americans have transformed schooling from a privilege granted to a few to a right guaranteed to all, and including children with special needs. Yet, the quality of this educational opportunity varies greatly from school to school.

Today, public education has lost this sense of civic involvement and active community participation. When schools try to include the public they typically only target parents. This made sense in a world where most families had children in school. However, that strategy no longer fits an America where education is the top concern — even among the 69 percent of the population without school-aged children. Nor does it match the reality of today's busy families.

Instead, we need to restore the school to its central place at the heart of communities' civic life by inviting in the retirees, "empty nesters", childless couples, and singles, who have been excluded from school activities in the past. We need to turn their strong concern about the quality of education into powerful involvement in the public schools by offering more creative opportunities to contribute and new structures for meaningful and satisfying involvement.

A civic involvement campaign for the schools is necessary because the needs of children and schools have dramatically changed. Children from single-parent homes and families in which both parents work need after-school activities, job preparation programs, and adult role models. Schools need support — both human and financial — for efforts to reduce class size, promote excellence in teaching, and enable all students to reach high standards. This level of contribution requires more than the occasional bake sale to raise money for extra programs like sports and music. We need to put the power of all members of the public behind all students in new ways.

Without citizen involvement and public commitment to quality education and equal academic and social opportunity, our public schools will not have survived. Only collective action to strengthen our public schools can ensure that future generations will gain the knowledge and skills they and their communities will need to thrive in a new century. The Herculean task of improving the schools can not be accomplished by any one group alone. It is a matter of all for all. Fortunately, Americans' concern over the quality of education is creating a willingness among broad sections of the public to take action to improve their local public schools. Now, public schools need to harness public concern for education by reaching beyond their traditional audience of parents and provide new opportunities and activities that can forge stronger links between the public and its public schools.

**Wendy D. Puriefoy**  
*President*  
*Public Education Network*

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## Executive Summary

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*Americans are strongly focused on and concerned about the issue of education and public schools, as these poll findings demonstrate. However, Americans' concern about the quality of public schools in this country is leading them in a different direction than might be expected and is frequently presumed.*

### **1** *The American electorate shows a strong willingness to become more, not less, involved in supporting and improving their local public schools.*

- Voters are concerned about the state of their local public schools, but are not willing to turn away from them or look for alternatives to public education.
- In many ways this concern is creating a renewed, shared commitment to improving local public schools.
- Most important, this commitment is shared by all members of the community, not just by parents with children in public schools.

### **2** *The basis for Americans' strong feelings about their local public schools is clear: overwhelmingly, they see good public schools as a resource that benefits the entire community, not just select groups of parents and children.*

- Voters see local public schools as providing an important framework for the health and vitality of local communities.
- Training children to become contributing members of the work force and teaching basic values are two of the myriad reasons voters identified as demonstrating why communities and individual citizens have a vested interest in supporting their local public schools.

### **3** *Improving the quality of education is the top priority of Americans.*

- Voters choose "making sure that your local public schools provide a quality education" as a nearly unanimous top priority for their communities to address, ahead of other important concerns such as dealing with crime, assisting seniors, attracting businesses and jobs, and reducing local taxes.
- While parents with children in public schools are somewhat more likely to list education and public schools as a high priority, all groups within the community, including seniors and those without experience sending children to public school, consider it a top issue.
- Americans' focus on education and public schools is tied, at least in part, to their concern about the performance of public schools. Public schools receive mixed ratings from voters — particularly from those who have the least immediate experience with local public schools, and overwhelmingly voters say there is work to be done in improving the quality of local public schools in their area.

### **4** *While concern about education and the quality of the nation's public schools is high, so is Americans' willingness to get involved in helping to improve schools.*

- In the current political environment, Americans place a special emphasis on the role of individual citizens in meeting community needs. While businesses and, to a lesser extent, government, are perceived as important, individual citizens are considered the leading force for change and improvement within local communities.
- When it comes to the challenge of improving the quality of local public schools, Americans express a willingness to back up these views with a range of initiatives that are oriented largely around the actions of individual citizens and community groups, rather than around school administrators or elected officials.

## 5 *To improve local public schools, voters identify as most effective solutions that entail more community effort and more community support to help local schools.*

- Solutions that are oriented around increasing community involvement in and knowledge about local school issues are strongly preferred over solutions that involve either simply providing more funding for schools or providing public funds for alternatives to public schools, such as private and religious schools.
- Voters feel that the support and involvement of individual citizens and community groups should focus on several themes, including making sure that students and teachers have the resources they need to achieve, holding schools more accountable for performance, and setting higher standards for students, teachers, and schools.

\* The margin of error for a sample of this size is  $\pm 2.8$ .

- Individuals identify a range of initiatives that they see as valuable and in which they would be willing to participate in supporting their local public schools. These initiatives involve a variety of activities, from volunteering to tutor students who need extra help, to actively participating in school board elections, to supporting school fund-raising activities.

## 6 *Despite Americans' focus on the issue of education and their willingness to become more involved in this area, challenges remain in fully engaging community involvement in and support for local public schools.*

- Particularly in the context of the focus group sessions, adults without children in public schools report feeling excluded and extraneous to the activities and needs of local public schools.
- Voters mention a variety of simple reforms to improve community involvement in public schools — ranging from creating more opportunities during times when people are not at work to making more information available about school budgets and school performance.
- Americans react positively to the concept of local education funds (LEFs) and express an interest in donating both time and money to such organization. LEFs have fairly widespread appeal. Both older and younger voters as well as those with children currently in public school and those who have never sent a child to public school think they are a good idea.

## Detailed Summary of Findings

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*The findings from this poll provide detailed insight into Americans' attitudes toward, impressions of, and commitment to their local public schools. The poll and the focus groups covered four central topics: the importance of local public schools as a community resource, responsibility for solving community problems and addressing community needs, community involvement in supporting and improving local public schools, and general reactions to the concept of local education funds.*

### 1 Quality Public Schools: A Valued Community Resource

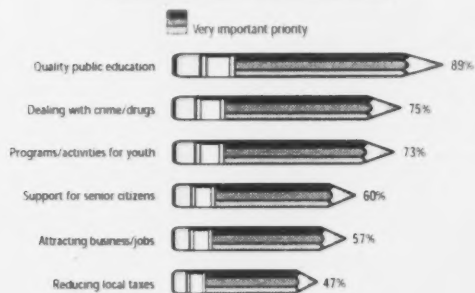
As these poll findings unequivocally demonstrate, Americans view their local public schools as an essential community resource. In fact, Americans place such a premium on the quality of their local public schools that this issue dominates the agenda of communities across the nation.

When asked about six different community priorities — including dealing with crime and drugs, providing youth with positive activities, assisting senior citizens, attracting businesses and jobs, and reducing local taxes — voters place "making sure that local schools provide a quality education" at the very top of the list. Almost nine in ten (89%) voters rate this as a very important priority, including 85% who have never had first-hand experience sending their children to public schools. This sentiment is

reiterated in the focus group sessions by adults without children in public schools, who nevertheless identify local public schools as the core of their communities. Americans place a higher priority on education and local public schools than on any other issue; "strengthening efforts to deal with crime and drugs" (75%) and "providing children and teenagers with positive, structured programs and activities" (73%) are important, but less compelling, priorities. (Q3a)

In selecting the one or two most important of these six priorities, a majority of voters (55%) again point to the quality of education provided by their local public schools, followed by other issues such as crime and drugs (32%), helping youth (28%), attracting new businesses and jobs (20%), and assisting seniors (20%); just 17% cite reducing local taxes — a concern that is often viewed as competing with local public schools — as a top priority.

#### Priorities for The Community



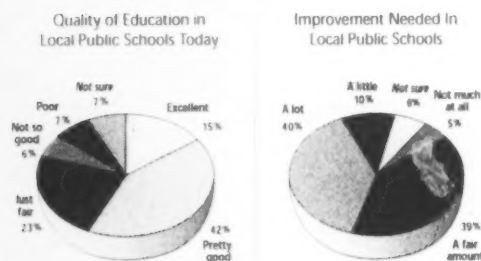
#### The Quality of Public Schools

The premium that the public places on the issue of education and local public schools parallels their concern about school performance and school quality. When asked in an open-ended question which issues or problems facing their local community concern them the most these days, voters again put education and schools at the top of the list. In fact, concern about schools and education is so pervasive that every category of voters — including seniors and those who have no experience sending a child to public school — mention it as one of their top two concerns about their community.

Americans give their local public schools somewhat mixed ratings: just 15% say that the quality of education provided in their local public schools is "excellent," while an additional 42% say it is "pretty good"; however, about one in four (23%) voters rate their local public schools as "just fair" and 13% say their schools are "not so good" or "poor." It is important to note that evaluations of public school performance become more positive with more direct, immediate experience with these schools. Parents with children currently in public schools — presumably those with the greatest amount of first-hand experience — are decidedly more positive in their feelings toward their local public schools, as 73% rate their local schools as "excellent" or "good," compared with 64% of voters who have sent children to public school in the past, and just 43% with no experience sending children to public school.

Consistent with their ratings of local public schools, Americans say that there is work to be done to improve the quality of their local schools: four in ten (40%) voters feel that a lot needs to be done to improve the quality of their local public schools, while an additional 39% believe that a fair amount needs to be done. Although parents start off giving their local public schools higher ratings, they are just as likely as are other members of the community to say that a lot or a fair amount needs to be done to improve public schools in their area.

### Evaluating Local Public Schools



### Who Benefits from Quality Public Schools?

The high priority that all Americans give to the issue of education and public schools is a reflection of their feelings about the benefits that good public schools have to offer. Overwhelmingly, voters say that communities as a whole, not just families with school-age children, benefit from having good public schools. In fact, by 91% to 7%, voters say that strong schools offer advantages to the broader public, not just to selected constituencies. It is notable that this sentiment is equally strong regardless of the immediate relationship to public schools: parents with children currently in public school, parents who have sent children to public school in the past, as well as voters who have never sent children to public schools all see the benefits of strong public schools as extending broadly to the larger community.

#### Who Benefits from Quality Public Schools?

|                                                | All Voters<br>% | Current Public<br>School Parents<br>% | Former Public<br>School Parents<br>% | Non-Parents<br>% |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Primarily families with<br>school-age children | 7               | 8                                     | 4                                    | 8                |
| Community as a whole                           | 91              | 91                                    | 94                                   | 90               |

When asked more specifically about what good public schools offer the community, voters volunteer a variety of ways in which the community benefits, ranging from very practical advantages, such as keeping kids out of trouble and increasing local property values, to more visionary benefits, such as preparing tomorrow's leaders and teaching children how to become good, productive citizens and make responsible life choices.

## 2 Forces for Community Action

With public schools and the quality of the education that they provide firmly at the top of voters' lists of both priorities and concerns, the

question of who is responsible for addressing community needs also emerges as an important issue. As these research findings demonstrate, Americans place a great deal of responsibility, hope, and confidence in the efforts of individual citizens to get involved in solving community problems and meeting community needs.

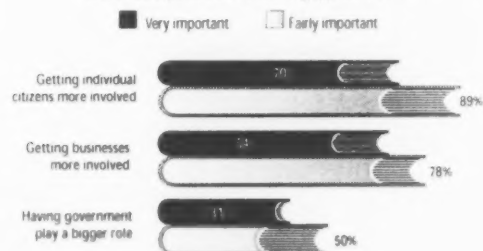
## Responsibility for Solving Community Problems

For as much as schools are seen as a top priority in the eyes of voters, individual citizens are seen as the leading force within the community to solve local problems and address local needs. While businesses and, to a lesser extent, government also are seen as playing important roles, individual citizens are singled out for their potential to contribute to and maintain their communities' well-being.

When asked specifically about meeting their communities' needs and making their communities better places to live, Americans give special emphasis to the role of individual citizens: almost nine in ten (89%) voters say that it is very (70%) or fairly (19%) important for individual citizens to get more involved. By comparison, 78% say the same about businesses (54% very important/24% fairly important), and just 50% say the same about government (31% very important/19% fairly important).

### Meeting Community Needs

To meet the needs of the community and make it a better place to live, how important are the following approaches?



78% say individuals could be doing somewhat more (39%) or a lot more (39%) to meet local needs/solve local problems; 69% say businesses could be doing somewhat more (37%) or a lot more (32%).

While individual citizens, followed by businesses, are seen as the leading forces within the community to meet local needs and solve local problems, there also is a strong sense that both of these groups need to be more engaged and more involved than they currently are in addressing community needs. More than three in four (78%) voters say that individual citizens could be doing more to help their communities, including 39% who say individuals could be doing a lot more. This sentiment also applies to the role of businesses in helping the community, as 69% say that businesses could be doing more to meet local needs.

Americans see increased involvement from individual citizens and businesses as a strong potential force for change and improvement in their local communities: almost half (45%) of voters say that increased involvement by individuals and businesses would make a very big difference in their community, with an additional 36% saying these efforts would make a fairly big difference.

## Individual Involvement

Americans see increased involvement by individual citizens and businesses as the key to solving local problems; but most important, they express a genuine willingness to back up these views by becoming more involved themselves. More than two-thirds (67%) of voters surveyed report having been involved in activities in their community to help other people or to support causes that they care about in the past year. In addition, more than eight in ten (81%) report having contributed money to support organizations, issues, or causes that they care about in the past year.

Overwhelmingly, these volunteers prefer to focus their efforts at the local and community level: 81% of voters say they are most attracted to local and community issues, 10% identify national issues, and just 2% point to international and global issues as their preferred level of involvement. (Q8b) A distinct profile emerges of those Americans who represent the greatest force for community involvement: these local activists (defined as those who contributed \$100 or more

to issues or causes in the past year, volunteered more than 20 hours to help others or support causes in the past year, and identify local or community issues as their preferred level of involvement) are more likely to share certain characteristics:

| Profile of Local Activists                    |                 |                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|                                               | All Voters<br>% | Local Activists<br>% |
| Age 35 to 49                                  | 31              | 38                   |
| Professionals/managers                        | 25              | 36                   |
| College degree or more                        | 36              | 45                   |
| Annual household income of more than \$50,000 | 34              | 48                   |

### 3 Community Involvement in Public Schools

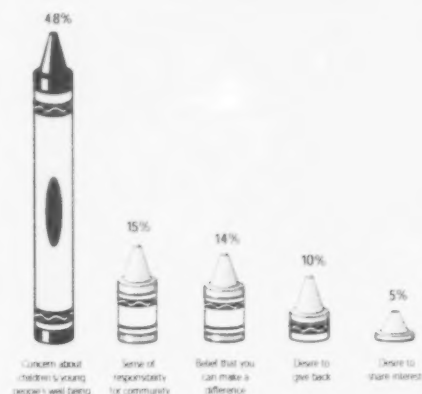
As these poll findings demonstrate, Americans' focus on the issues of education and the quality of their local public schools, combined with their feelings about the important role of individual citizens in addressing local needs and solving local problems, are producing a strong, fresh commitment to public education in communities across the country. Voters place a premium on the value of public education and increasingly are expressing a willingness and a desire to redouble their efforts to provide public schools with the resources and support that these schools need to succeed.

Americans' commitment to supporting their local public schools stems from their recognition of the important framework that quality public schools provide local communities. Specifically, voters identify four basic functions that schools carry out in building strong communities as important reasons for communities to support local public schools: providing children with the education they need to become productive, contributing members of both the community and the work force (89% very important reason), bringing together children from different backgrounds and teaching them respect and tolerance toward one another (72%), providing a common resource for helping children and families in the

community (70%), and attracting local businesses and good jobs that create a strong tax base and a better quality of life (62%).

In addition, Americans associate a set of core values with community support for and involvement in local public schools. Primarily, voters identify "feeling concerned about the well-being of children and young people in your community" (48%) as most salient, along with "feeling a sense of personal responsibility for what goes on in your community" (15%), and "feeling as though your involvement can really make a difference" (14%).

#### Most Important Values in Getting Involved in Public Schools



The basic, yet critical, functions that local public schools serve in building strong communities along with the core values associated with supporting local public schools provide a strong incentive for individuals to get involved in helping their local public schools. Importantly, Americans also recognize that the support of communities and individuals increasingly plays a valuable role in determining whether their local public schools succeed. More than half (51%) of voters express strong agreement with the statement, "school officials and government alone cannot do all that is necessary to improve public schools, unless there is more community involvement and support for public education at the same time." In the focus group sessions, both parents and non-parents agree that the task of improving and maintaining local

public schools cannot be left to educators, elected officials, and other experts alone and that individual citizens and communities need to play an integral role.

## Improving Local Public Schools Effectively

In identifying specific ways to improve local schools in their area, Americans strongly embrace efforts that require increased community involvement in various educational goals and programs and turn away from solutions that emphasize simply increased funding for public schools or finding alternative academic settings.

When presented with five suggested methods for improving local schools, more than eight in ten voters identify as most effective two solutions that involve increased community efforts: community efforts to raise academic standards and hold schools more accountable (85% would help a lot/a fair amount) and additional community support for local schools, through the involvement of local citizens and businesses (81%). Solutions that rely solely on increased funding for public schools as well as those that emphasize alternatives to public schools, such as making public funds available to private and religious schools, are seen as comparatively less effective. The emphasis that is placed on solu-

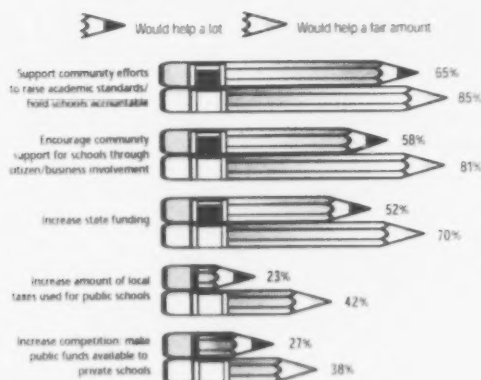
tions that require increased community involvement is shared fairly equally by all members of the community, including parents with children currently in public school as well as y those without first-hand experience sending children to public school.

In expressing their views about the state of their local public schools and what can be done to improve them, Americans do not talk only about what teachers, principals, administrators, and elected officials can or should do; instead, they cite a number of ways in which individual citizens and community groups can get involved in improving their local public schools. Specifically, voters say that individual citizens and community groups must "make sure that all students have the resources to achieve higher academic standards" (38%), "support increases in funding to provide more opportunities for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge" (20%), and "increase the rewards and punishments to encourage schools to meet high standards" (15%) in order to improve their local public schools.

## Encouraging Greater Community Involvement

While Americans understand that greater community involvement plays an essential role in improving local public schools and also express a willingness to do more on this issue, obstacles and barriers remain in fully engaging the community's commitment to public schools. About half (46%) of voters who have never sent a child to public school say that they have not personally visited a public school in the past year. In addition, about one in four (26%) parents with children in public school have not attended a school board hearing, taken part in a campaign that pushed a particular issue, or helped a teacher in class in the past two years. In particular, the focus group session conducted among adults without children in public school provide insight into the barriers that affect greater community involvement in local public schools. Almost unanimously, participants in the focus group report feeling excluded and extraneous

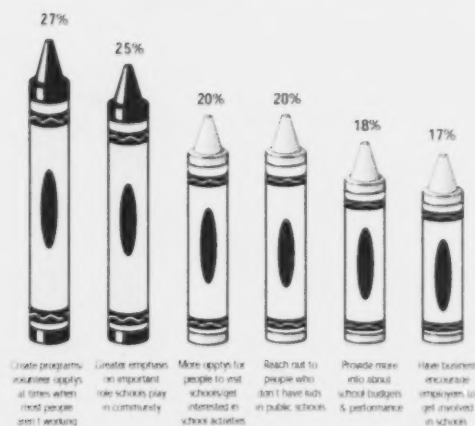
### Improving Local Public Schools



to the important activities taking place at their local public schools.

Voters identify a variety of ways to encourage community involvement in local public schools, from creating more programs and opportunities during non-working hours to providing more information about schools' budgets and performance. Taken together, these fairly simple reforms provide a basis for capitalizing on voters' widespread commitment and desire to improve their local public schools.

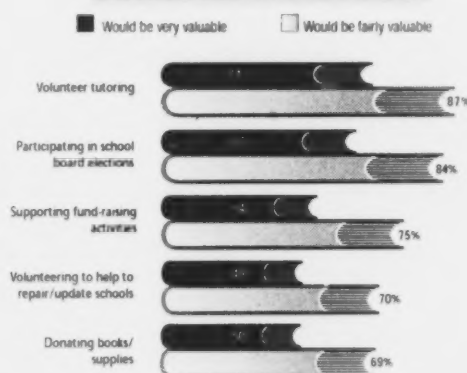
### Best Ways To Get Communities More Involved in Public Schools



Beyond things that schools and elected officials can do to improve community involvement in their local public schools, voters also identify a series of valuable initiatives in which they can participate individually to support their local public schools. While some of these initiatives involve direct service to schools and students, such as volunteering to tutor students or helping to repair school facilities, others involve more general forms of support, such as actively participating in school board elections so that school boards are responsive to community interests. All of these initiatives are seen as valuable and all have appeal among different groups within

the community; for example, women (44%) are far more likely than are men (30%) to identify volunteering to tutor students as a way that they would get involved, whereas men (37%) are more likely to point to participating actively in school board elections (25%).

### Supporting Local Public Schools



### 4 Local Education Funds

Voters react favorably to the concept of local education funds. More than one in three (34%) give the description a rating of "9" or "10" on a 10-point scale, with an additional 33% who rate it as a "7" or "8." Women, blacks and Hispanics, voters in urban and suburban areas as well as those with lower incomes are particularly likely to find the idea of local education funds appealing.

Voters also express interest in donating both time and money to support a local education fund if one existed in their community. More than half (53%) of voters overall say that they would be very or fairly likely to donate time to a local education fund in their area, and 47% say the same about donating money.

# SAMPLE SURVEY

OCTOBER 1999



*I'm calling from Peter D. Hart Research, the national public opinion polling firm. We are conducting a national survey, and I'd really appreciate the chance to get your opinions on a few questions. Your number was selected at random, and in this household, I am supposed to speak with the (youngest/oldest) (man/woman) age 18 or over who is at home now. This is a public opinion survey, and you will not be sold anything.*

Gender (Do not ask.) Record the respondent's gender.

Male .....1  
Female .....2

Q1a Are you currently registered to vote at this address?

Yes .....1  
No .....2 (Terminate)  
Not sure .....3 (Terminate)

Q1b Thinking back on the various national, state, and local elections in which you have been eligible to vote in the past few years, would you say that you have voted in all these elections, most of them, about half of them, or fewer than half of these elections?

All of them .....1  
Most of them .....2  
About half of them .....3  
Fewer than half of them .....4  
Not sure .....5

Q2a We're interested in finding out how people feel about the way things are going in their local communities. Generally speaking, how satisfied would you say you are with the overall conditions in your community today — very satisfied, fairly satisfied, just somewhat satisfied, or not that satisfied?

Very satisfied .....1  
Fairly satisfied .....2  
Just somewhat satisfied .....3  
Not that satisfied .....4  
Not sure .....5

Q2b What issues or problems facing your local community concern you the most these days? (Probe:) Are there any other issues or problems facing your community that concern you?

Q3a I'm going to mention some steps people have said would help improve their communities, and I'd like to find out how important you feel each one of these steps would be for your own community. For each item I mention, please tell me whether you consider it to be a very important priority for your community, a fairly important priority, a somewhat important priority, or a lower priority.

*\*Conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.*

*Making sure your local public schools provide a quality education*  
*Strengthening efforts to deal with crime and drugs*  
*Bringing new businesses and jobs to your community*  
*Providing children and teenagers with positive, structured programs and activities*  
*Reducing local taxes*  
*Providing more support and assistance to senior citizens*

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Very important priority     | 1 |
| Fairly important priority   | 2 |
| Somewhat important priority | 3 |
| Lower priority              | 4 |
| Not sure                    | 5 |

**Q3b** Let me read you this list of items again, and this time, please tell me which one or two of these items you feel are the most important priorities for your community today.  
**(Read list. Accept up to two responses.)**

|                                                                                    |   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Making sure that your local public schools provide a quality education             | 1 |
| Strengthening efforts to deal with crime and drugs                                 | 2 |
| Bringing new businesses and jobs to your community                                 | 3 |
| Providing children and teenagers with positive, structured programs and activities | 4 |
| Reducing local taxes                                                               | 5 |
| Providing more support and assistance to senior citizens                           | 6 |
| None of these (VOL)                                                                | 7 |
| Not sure                                                                           | 8 |

**Q4** To meet the needs of your community and make your community a better place to live, how important do you think it is to **(Read item.)** — very important, fairly important, just somewhat important, or not that important?

*Have government play a bigger role in meeting community needs and solving community problems*  
*Get businesses more involved in meeting community needs and solving community problems*  
*Get individual citizens more involved in meeting community needs and solving community problems*

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Very important          | 1 |
| Fairly important        | 2 |
| Just somewhat important | 3 |
| Not that important      | 4 |
| Not sure                | 5 |

**Q5a** Would you say that individuals in your community are already doing as much as can reasonably be expected to meet local needs and solve local problems, or would you say that they could be doing more to meet local needs and solve local problems? **(If "Could be doing more," ask:)** Would you say that they could be doing somewhat more or a lot more to meet local needs and solve local problems?

|                                             |   |
|---------------------------------------------|---|
| Doing as much as can reasonably be expected | 1 |
| Could be doing somewhat more                | 2 |
| Could be doing a lot more                   | 3 |
| Not sure                                    | 4 |

- Q5b Would you say that businesses in your community are already doing as much as can reasonably be expected to meet local needs and solve local problems, or would you say that they could be doing more to meet local needs and solve local problems? (If "Could be doing more," ask:) Would you say that they could be doing somewhat more or a lot more to meet local needs and solve local problems?
- |                                             |   |
|---------------------------------------------|---|
| Doing as much as can reasonably be expected | 1 |
| Could be doing somewhat more                | 2 |
| Could be doing a lot more                   | 3 |
| Not sure                                    | 4 |
- Q6 If individuals and businesses became more involved in meeting needs and solving problems in your community, do you think that it would make a very big difference in your community, a fairly big difference, just a small difference, or no real difference in your community?
- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Very big difference     | 1 |
| Fairly big difference   | 2 |
| Just a small difference | 3 |
| No real difference      | 4 |
| Not sure                | 5 |
- Q7 From what you have seen in your own community in the past few years, do you think that the willingness of individuals to get involved in helping their community is growing or declining?
- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Growing   | 1 |
| Declining | 2 |
| Not sure  | 3 |
- Q8a Thinking back over the past year, have you donated money to help support organizations, issues, or causes that you care about? (If "YES," ASK:) Just as your best estimate, how much money would you say you have donated in the past year to support organizations, issues, or causes that you care about — less than fifty dollars, between fifty and one hundred dollars, between one hundred and two hundred and fifty dollars, between two hundred and fifty and five hundred dollars, or more than five hundred dollars?
- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| No, have not donated money           | 1 |
| Yes, donated less than \$50          | 2 |
| Yes, donated between \$50 and \$100  | 3 |
| Yes, donated between \$100 and \$250 | 4 |
| Yes, donated between \$250 and \$500 | 5 |
| Yes, donated more than \$500         | 6 |
| Not sure                             | 7 |
- Q8b To which one of the following three types of organizations or causes would you be the most likely to contribute money — one that focuses primarily on (a) international and global issues, (b) national issues, or (c) local and community issues?
- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| (a) international and global issues | 1 |
| (b) national issues                 | 2 |
| (c) local and community issues      | 3 |
| All of these (VOL.)                 | 4 |
| Not sure                            | 5 |

- Q9a** Thinking back over the past year, outside work, have you been involved in any activities in your community to help other people or to support causes that you care about? (If "Yes," ask:) Just as your best estimate, how many hours would you say you have spent on these types of activities in the past year—fewer than ten hours, between ten and twenty hours, between twenty and fifty hours, or more than fifty hours?
- |                              |   |             |
|------------------------------|---|-------------|
| No, have not been involved   | 1 |             |
| Yes, fewer than 10 hours     | 2 | (Go to Q9c) |
| Yes, between 10 and 20 hours | 3 | (Go to Q9c) |
| Yes, between 20 and 50 hours | 4 | (Go to Q9c) |
| Yes, more than 50 hours      | 5 | (Go to Q9c) |
| Not sure                     | 6 | (Go to Q9c) |

- Q9b** (Ask only of respondents who say they did not volunteer time in Q9a.) Which one or two of the following would you say are the most important reasons why you did not participate in these types of activities in the past year? (Read list. Accept up to two responses.)

- |                                                                                                   |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| I was too busy and did not have enough time                                                       | 1 |
| I was not asked or given the opportunity                                                          | 2 |
| I did not know how to get involved or where to sign up for activities                             | 3 |
| I didn't feel that my individual involvement would really make a difference                       | 4 |
| I've tried to get involved in the past, but there were too many hassles and red tape to deal with | 5 |
| None of these (VOL)                                                                               | 6 |
| Not sure                                                                                          | 7 |

- Q9c** (Ask only of respondents who donated money in Q8a or who volunteered time in Q9a.) What kinds of organizations, issues, or causes have you been involved in supporting over the past year, either by donating money or volunteering your time?

(READ TO EVERYONE.)

Now I'd like to focus on the public schools in your community.

- Q10a** How important do you feel it is for your community to have good public schools — extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not very important?

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Extremely important | 1 |
| Very important      | 2 |
| Somewhat important  | 3 |
| Not very important  | 4 |
| Not sure            | 5 |

- Q10b** Do you think that families with school-age children are the ones who primarily benefit from having good public schools, or do you feel that the community as a whole benefits from having good public schools?

- |                                                     |   |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Families with school-age children primarily benefit | 1 | (Skip to Q11a) |
| Community as a whole benefits                       | 2 |                |
| Not sure                                            | 3 | (Skip to Q11a) |

- Q10c** (Ask only of respondents who say that having good public schools benefits the community as a whole in Q10b.)  
Why do you feel that way? What examples come to mind about how the community as a whole benefits from having good public schools? (**Probe:**) Are there other ways that the community as a whole benefits from having good public schools?
- Q11a** (**ASK EVERYONE.**) Do you have any children who are currently attending school, at any level from kindergarten through twelfth grade? (**If "Yes," ask:**) Do they attend public school or private or parochial school?
- |                                                                     |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| No, no children in school                                           | 1                |
| Yes, children attend public school                                  | 2 (Skip to Q12a) |
| Yes, children attend private/parochial school                       | 3 (Skip to Q12a) |
| Yes, children attend both public and private/parochial school (VOL) | 4 (Skip to Q12a) |
| Yes, children attend other type of school (VOL)                     | 5 (Skip to Q12a) |
| Not sure                                                            | 6 (Skip to Q12a) |
- Q11b** (Ask only of respondents who say they do not have kids in grades K through 12 in Q11a.)  
Do you have any younger children in your household who are not yet old enough for kindergarten? (**If "Yes," ask:**) As of now, do you plan to send your younger children to the local public schools in your community when they are school-age?
- |                                                                    |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| No, have no younger children                                       | 1 |
| Yes, plan on sending children to local public schools              | 2 |
| Yes, do not plan on sending children to local public schools (VOL) | 3 |
| Yes, not sure whether sending children to local public schools     | 4 |
| Not sure                                                           | 5 |
- Q11c** (Ask only of respondents who say they do not have kids in grades K through 12 in Q11a.)  
Do you have any older children or grown children who previously attended the local public schools in your community when they were school-age?
- |                                                              |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| No, no older children                                        | 1 |
| Yes, children attended local public schools                  | 2 |
| Yes, children did not attend local public schools (VOL)      | 3 |
| Yes, not sure whether children attended local public schools | 4 |
| Not sure                                                     | 5 |
- Q12a** (**ASK EVERYONE.**) How would you rate the quality of the education that students receive in your local public schools today — excellent, pretty good, just fair, not so good, or poor?
- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Excellent   | 1 |
| Pretty good | 2 |
| Just fair   | 3 |
| Not so good | 4 |
| Poor        | 5 |
| Not sure    | 6 |
- Q12b** Looking ahead, how much do you feel needs to be done to improve the quality of your local public schools — do you feel that a lot, a fair amount, a little, or not much at all needs to be done?
- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| A lot needs to be done           | 1 |
| A fair amount needs to be done   | 2 |
| A little needs to be done        | 3 |
| Not much at all needs to be done | 4 |
| Not sure                         | 5 |

(FORM A)

**Q13** I'm going to mention some different ways of improving local public schools. For each one that I mention, please tell me whether you think this would help a lot, help a fair amount, help just somewhat, or not help that much at all in improving local public schools in your area?

*Support community efforts to raise academic standards and hold schools more accountable*  
*Increase state funding for local public schools*  
*Increase the amount of local taxes that are used for local public schools*  
*Encourage more community support for local schools, through the involvement of local citizens and businesses*  
*Increase competition by making public funds available to private and religious schools.*

Would help a lot .....1  
Would help a fair amount .....2  
Would help just somewhat .....3  
Would not help that much at all .....4  
Not sure .....5

**Q14a** Now I'd like to mention several things that citizens and community groups could do to improve their public schools. Please tell me which **ONE** of the following you think would do the most to improve local public schools in your area.

Increase the number of citizens who vote in school board elections and who are informed about school issues .....1  
Support increases in funding to provide more opportunities for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge .....2  
Increase the rewards and punishments to encourage schools to meet high standards .....3  
Make sure that all students have the resources to achieve higher academic standards .....4  
Build community knowledge and understanding of school budgets and other resources that help schools do a better job .....5  
None of these (VOL) .....6  
Not sure .....7

**Q14b** I am going to mention some different things that people do to support their local public schools. For each one that I mention, please tell me whether that is something you have done in the past two years.

*Attended a school board or advisory committee meeting*  
*Voted in school board elections or on a school bond issue*  
*Attended school-related activities*  
*Kept myself personally informed about school issues*  
*Took part in a campaign that pushed a particular school-related issue*  
*Helped a teacher in class or tutored students after school*

Yes, have done in past two years .....1  
No, have not done in past two years .....2  
Not sure .....3

**Q15a** On a scale from one to ten, on which a "10" means that you totally agree and a "1" means that you totally disagree, please tell me which number best represents your reaction to the following statements. (Record "Not Sure" as a DK.)

*School officials and government alone cannot do all that is necessary to improve public schools, unless there is more community involvement and support for public education at the same time. School officials and government do not do enough to encourage community involvement and support for public education*

Numeric Range \_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_

Permitted Range 1 TO 10

**(FORM B)**

**Q15b** Now I'd like to mention several reasons that different people have given for why supporting quality public education in their local area is important. For each one, please tell me whether you think it is a very important, a fairly important, just a somewhat important, or not a very important reason to support quality public schools in your local area.

*Good public schools attract local businesses and good jobs to the area and create a stronger tax base and a better quality of life for the community*

*Children need to receive a good education in public school to become productive, contributing members of the community and work force*

*Local public schools bring together children from all backgrounds in the community and teach them to respect and get along with one another*

*Local public schools are an important community resource that brings people in an area together for the common purpose of helping children, families, and the community*

|                                        |   |
|----------------------------------------|---|
| Very important reason .....            | 1 |
| Fairly important reason .....          | 2 |
| Just a somewhat important reason ..... | 3 |
| Not a very important reason .....      | 4 |
| Not sure .....                         | 5 |

**Q16a** Have you personally visited a public school in your community in the past year?

|                                            |   |
|--------------------------------------------|---|
| Yes, have visited a public school .....    | 1 |
| No, have not visited a public school ..... | 2 |
| Not sure .....                             | 3 |

**(FORM A)**

**Q16b** Which one or two of the following changes do you think would do the most to improve community involvement in public schools in your area? **(Accept up to two responses.)**

|                                                                                                               |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Provide more information about school budgets and performance .....                                           | 1 |
| Create more opportunities for people to visit public schools and get interested in school activities .....    | 2 |
| Put a greater emphasis on the important role that schools play in the community .....                         | 3 |
| Make special efforts to reach out to people in the community who do not have children in public schools ..... | 4 |
| Create more programs and volunteer opportunities during times when most adults are not working .....          | 5 |
| Have businesses encourage their employees to get involved in public schools .....                             | 6 |
| None of these (VOL) .....                                                                                     | 7 |
| Not sure .....                                                                                                | 8 |

(FORM B)

**Q17** I'd like to mention several different values that people mention when they talk about getting involved in helping public schools in their area. Please tell me which one of the following values is most important to you personally. **(Read list. Accept only one response.)**

- Wanting to give back to others in your community .....1
- Feeling as though your involvement can really make a difference .....2
- Feeling concerned about the well-being of children and young people  
in your community .....3
- Feeling a sense of personal responsibility for what goes on in your  
community .....4
- Wanting to share your interests with others in your community .....5
- None of these (VOL) .....6
- Not sure .....7

**Q18a** I'm going to read a list of several ways in which people in the community can get involved in supporting their local public schools. For each one, please tell me how valuable you think this type of community involvement would be to local public schools — very valuable, fairly valuable, just somewhat valuable, or not very valuable?

*Volunteering to tutor students who need extra help outside the classroom*  
*Volunteering time and services to help repair and update school facilities*  
*Participating actively in school board elections to make sure that school boards are responsive to community interests*  
*Donating books and supplies to area schools*  
*Supporting fund-raising activities to help raise money for school needs*

- Very valuable .....1
- Fairly valuable .....2
- Just somewhat valuable .....3
- Not very valuable .....4
- Not sure .....5

**Q18b** Now I'd like to reread the same list of ways that people in the community can get involved in supporting their local public schools. This time, please tell me which one or two you personally would be most likely to do. **(Read list. Accept up to two responses.)**

- Volunteering to tutor students who need extra help outside the  
classroom .....1
- Volunteering time and services to help repair and update school  
facilities .....2
- Participating actively in school board elections to make sure that  
school boards are responsive to community interests .....3
- Donating books and supplies to area schools .....4
- Supporting fund-raising activities to help raise money for school needs .....5
- None of these (VOL) .....6
- Not sure .....7

**Q19a** Finally, I'd like to read a description of a network of organizations that exists in different communities to support local public schools, and then get your reaction.

*Community involvement groups are organizations that consist of business and community leaders, school officials, teachers, parents, and concerned citizens who work together to support public education by encouraging public schools to improve, organizing community forums where citizens can discuss ways of raising educational standards, and providing additional resources for school activities.*

Based on this description, how would you rate community involvement groups on a scale from one to ten, on which a "10" means that they are an extremely good idea and a "1" means that they are not a good idea at all? (If "Not Sure," record DK.)

Numeric Range \_\_\_\_\_

Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_

Permitted Range 1 TO 10

**Q19b** From what you've just heard, how likely do you think you would be to donate time to support a community involvement group in your area — very likely, fairly likely, just somewhat likely, or not very likely?

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| Very likely          | .1 |
| Fairly likely        | .2 |
| Just somewhat likely | .3 |
| Not very likely      | .4 |
| Not sure             | .5 |

**Q19c** From what you've just heard, how likely do you think you would be to donate money to support a community involvement group in your area — very likely, fairly likely, just somewhat likely, or not very likely?

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| Very likely          | .1 |
| Fairly likely        | .2 |
| Just somewhat likely | .3 |
| Not very likely      | .4 |
| Not sure             | .5 |

**Q20** Which one of the following people or groups do you trust the most on issues about improving the public schools in your local community? (Read list. Accept only one response.)

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Local teachers                      | .1 |
| Elected officials in your community | .2 |
| Your local school board             | .3 |
| Local business leaders              | .4 |
| Local religious leaders             | .5 |
| None of these (VOL)                 | .6 |
| Not sure                            | .7 |

**FACTUALS:** Now I'm going to ask you a few questions for statistical purposes only.

**QF1** How old are you? (If refused, ask:) Well, would you tell me which age group you belong to? (Read list.)

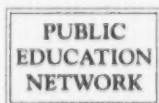
|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| 18-24            | .1 |
| 25-29            | .2 |
| 30-34            | .3 |
| 35-39            | .4 |
| 40-44            | .5 |
| 45-49            | .6 |
| 50-54            | .7 |
| 55-59            | .8 |
| 60-64            | .9 |
| 65-69            | .0 |
| 70-74            | .1 |
| 75 and over      | .2 |
| Refused/not sure | .3 |

- QF2 Are you currently employed?  
**(If currently employed, ask:) What type of work do you do? (Record under "6-Other.")**  
**(If not currently employed, ask:) Are you a student, a homemaker, retired, or unemployed and looking for work?**
- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Student .....                      | 1 |
| Homemaker .....                    | 2 |
| Retired .....                      | 3 |
| Unemployed, looking for work ..... | 4 |
| Not sure .....                     | 5 |
| Other .....                        | 0 |
| Other specify .....                |   |
- QF3 What is the last grade that you completed in school? **(Do not read choices.)**
- |                                                        |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Grade school .....                                     | 1 |
| Some high school .....                                 | 2 |
| High school graduate .....                             | 3 |
| Some college, no degree .....                          | 4 |
| Vocational training, 2-year college .....              | 5 |
| 4-year college/bachelor's degree .....                 | 6 |
| Some postgraduate work, no degree .....                | 7 |
| 2 or 3 years' postgraduate work, master's degree ..... | 8 |
| Doctoral degree/law degree .....                       | 9 |
| Not sure .....                                         | 0 |
- QF4 How would you describe your overall point of view in terms of the political parties?  
Would you say that you are mostly Democratic, leaning Democratic, completely independent, leaning Republican, or mostly Republican?
- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Mostly Democratic .....      | 1 |
| Leaning Democratic .....     | 2 |
| Completely independent ..... | 3 |
| Leaning Republican .....     | 4 |
| Mostly Republican .....      | 5 |
| Not sure .....               | 6 |
- QF5 In politics today, do you generally consider yourself to be very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, very conservative, or do you think that your views cannot really be described in those terms?
- |                                                |   |
|------------------------------------------------|---|
| Very liberal .....                             | 1 |
| Somewhat liberal .....                         | 2 |
| Moderate .....                                 | 3 |
| Somewhat conservative .....                    | 4 |
| Very conservative .....                        | 5 |
| Views cannot be described in those terms ..... | 6 |
| Not sure .....                                 | 7 |
- QF6 How would you describe the area in which you live — urban, suburban, small town, or rural?
- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Urban .....      | 1 |
| Suburban .....   | 2 |
| Small town ..... | 3 |
| Rural .....      | 4 |
| Not sure .....   | 5 |

- QF7 In what religion were you brought up? (Do not read list.)
- Protestant .....1
  - Catholic .....2
  - Jewish .....3
  - Other .....4
  - None .....5
  - Not sure/refused .....6
- QF8 If you added together the yearly income of all the members of your family who were living at home last year, would the total be less than \$10,000, between \$10,000 and \$20,000, between \$20,000 and \$30,000, between \$30,000 and \$40,000, between \$40,000 and \$50,000, between \$50,000 and \$75,000, between \$75,000 and \$100,000, or would the total be more than \$100,000?
- Less than \$10,000 .....1
  - Between \$10,000 and \$20,000 .....2
  - Between \$20,000 and \$30,000 .....3
  - Between \$30,000 and \$40,000 .....4
  - Between \$40,000 and \$50,000 .....5
  - Between \$50,000 and \$75,000 .....6
  - Between \$75,000 and \$100,000 .....7
  - More than \$100,000 .....8
  - Not sure/refused .....9
- QF9 And are you from a Hispanic or Spanish-speaking background? (If "No," ask:) What is your race — white, black, Asian, or something else?
- Hispanic .....1
  - White .....2
  - Black .....3
  - Asian .....4
  - Other .....5
  - Not sure/refused .....6

That concludes my interview today. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

*The mission of the  
Public Education Network (PEN)  
is to create systems of  
public education that result  
in high achievement  
for every child.*



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